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## ABSTRACT

This leaflet explains the school curriculum in England. Topics addressed include: (1) Which subjects do pupils have to study? (2) How does the National Curriculum work? (3) How is each pupil's progress assessed? (4) Do pupils have to sit national tests and examinations? (5) How can parents find out how their children are doing? (6) What choices are available for 14- to 16-year-olds? (7) Can parents withdraw their children from some subjects? (8) Will there be more changes to the National Curriculum? and (9) How can I find out more? (EH)

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# The School Curriculum: A Brief Guide

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# THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

A Brief Guide

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Schools should give all pupils the opportunity to achieve their best, within a broad and balanced curriculum.

The National Curriculum, including assessment, plays an important part in



providing this opportunity. The Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) inspect schools, and they have confirmed that the

National Curriculum is raising standards.

This leaflet explains the school curriculum in England.

# Which subjects do pupils have to study?

Pupils aged 5 to 16 in state schools must be taught the National Curriculum, which is made up of the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, design and technology, information technology, history, geography, music, art, physical education (PE) and a modern foreign language. The National Curriculum sets out, in broad terms, what schools must teach for each subject.



The National Curriculum is divided into four stages. These are called key stages and depend on pupils' ages. The table below shows when pupils study each subject.

**KEY STAGES AND PUPILS' AGES**

| Key<br>Stage 1<br>Aged<br>5 to 7 | Key<br>Stage 2<br>Aged<br>7 to 11 | Key<br>Stage 3<br>Aged<br>11 to 14 | Key<br>Stage 4<br>Aged<br>14 to 16 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|

| English                 |  |  |  |  |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Mathematics             |  |  |  |  |
| Science                 |  |  |  |  |
| Physical education      |  |  |  |  |
| Design and technology   |  |  |  |  |
| Information technology  |  |  |  |  |
| Modern foreign language |  |  |  |  |
| History                 |  |  |  |  |
| Geography               |  |  |  |  |
| Music                   |  |  |  |  |
| Art                     |  |  |  |  |

Pupils going into Key Stage 4 before September 1996 do not have to be taught design and technology, information technology and a modern foreign language.

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Pupils must also study religious education (RE), and secondary schools must provide sex education. The content of these two subjects is decided locally but must remain within the law. The Government also plans to make all secondary schools responsible for providing careers education.

Schools organise their own timetable, and can decide what else to teach their pupils.



## How does the National Curriculum work?

Every school has National Curriculum documents for each subject. These documents describe what teachers must teach at each key stage.

Most National Curriculum subjects are divided into different areas of learning. For example, English is divided into three areas: speaking and listening, reading, and writing.

The National Curriculum does not include detailed lesson plans for teachers. Schools and teachers draw up their own lesson plans based on the National Curriculum. Teachers will plan these lessons, taking account of their pupils' needs. Schools also decide for themselves which text books and other teaching materials to use.



## How is each pupil's progress assessed?

The National Curriculum sets standards of achievement in each subject for pupils aged 5 to 14. For most subjects these standards range from levels 1 to 8. Pupils climb up the levels as they get older and learn more.

- ◆ The standards at level 2 should challenge typical 7-year-olds
- ◆ The standards at level 4 should challenge typical 11-year-olds
- ◆ The standards at levels 5 and 6 should challenge typical 14-year-olds

More able pupils will reach the standards above these levels, and exceptionally able 14-year-olds may reach the standards above level 8.

The National Curriculum for music, art and PE does not use levels 1 to 8. Instead, there is a single description of the standard that most pupils can expect to reach at the end of a key stage for each area of learning.



All teachers check their pupils' progress in each subject as a normal part of their teaching. They must also assess pupils' progress in English, mathematics and science against the National Curriculum standards when pupils reach ages 7, 11 and 14. The teacher decides which level best describes a pupil's performance in each area of learning in the subject. The teacher then uses these to work out an overall level in that subject.

## Do pupils have to sit national tests and examinations?

There are national tests for 7-, 11- and 14-year-olds in English and mathematics. Pupils aged 11 and 14 are also tested in science. The tests give an independent measure of how pupils and schools are doing compared with the national standards in these subjects.

Most 16-year-olds take GCSEs or similar qualifications.

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## How can parents find out how their children are doing?

At least once a year schools must give parents a written report on how their children are doing in all subjects. This report will also explain how parents can arrange to discuss comments in the report with teachers.

If a child is 7, 11, or 14, the report will also include their results in the national tests. It will show how these results compare with other children of the same age. The report will also give the results of any public examinations, such as GCSEs, that the child has taken during the year.



## What choices are available for 14- to 16-year-olds?

At Key Stage 4 the National Curriculum gives schools the opportunity to offer pupils aged 14 to 16 a wider choice of subjects. This includes a range of GCSE and vocational courses.

The diagram on page 2 shows which National Curriculum subjects pupils aged 14 to 16 must continue to study. English, mathematics and science remain a central part of the curriculum and most pupils will take a GCSE course in these subjects. Pupils must also continue to study RE and PE.

From September 1996, schools must also teach design and technology and a modern foreign language to pupils starting Key Stage 4. They must teach at least a short course in these subjects, which will be roughly the same as doing half a GCSE, but many schools will offer full courses. Pupils must also study information technology from September 1996.

## Can parents withdraw their children from some subjects?

Parents can withdraw their children from some or all RE and sex education lessons. They cannot withdraw them from any part of the National Curriculum.

There are some pupils, however, who do not have to follow the National Curriculum. Usually, this only happens if all or part of the National Curriculum is not suitable for a pupil because he or she has certain special educational needs.



## Will there be more changes to the National Curriculum?

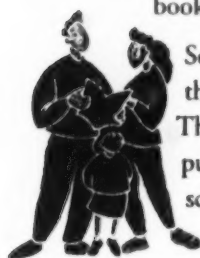
In 1994 there was a major review of the National Curriculum. As a result, the curriculum was slimmed down to make it more manageable for schools. For 5- to 14-year-olds these changes start in September 1995. For 14- to 16-year-olds the changes start from September 1996.

The Government does not plan to make any more major changes before the year 2000.

## How can I find out more?

Each school has a prospectus and this must explain the school's curriculum, how the curriculum is organised for different year groups, and how it is taught. Parents can ask to see copies of the National Curriculum documents, the RE syllabus the school is using and the school's sex education policy.

You may also find copies of the National Curriculum documents in public libraries, and you can buy them from bookshops that sell HMSO publications. You can find the addresses of HMSO bookshops in the Yellow Pages or you can ring 0171 873 0011.



Schools should be able to answer parents' questions about the national tests and how pupils are assessed by teachers. The Department for Education and Employment also publishes information on national testing and assessment in schools. To find out about these and other publications, ring 0171 925 5555.

If you would like more copies of this leaflet, please ring 0171 510 0150. Deaf people can order on text phone number 0171 925 6873. You can also get a copy of this leaflet in Bengali, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Turkish, Urdu and Vietnamese. It is also available in Braille and on audio cassette for blind people by ringing 0171 510 0150.

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